

Goals to protect the river

Brookhaven's Carmans River Protection Plan draws crowd

By LINDA LEUZZI

As a full moon emerged on a mild night, 105 residents made their way to Brookhaven Town Hall to listen to planners, environmental advocates, a councilwoman and a county legislator, as well as engineers and a supervisor who pledged to protect a significant ribbon of water that cuts an 11-mile swath of natural beauty through Brookhaven.

"The Carmans River is one of my very top priorities," said Supervisor Mark Lesko to the packed conference hall. "It has not been spoiled yet. It's not dead like the Forge River. If we don't act now, shame on us."

For two hours, Lesko and others, including Councilwoman Connie Kepert (4th District), introduced and elaborated on the town strategies that would protect the Carmans River in an effective, holistic fashion. Creating a Carmans River Watershed Protection Overlay District that would incur specific preventive criteria to protect the river's health, including a fertilizer ordinance, targeting open space funding via a priority list of parcels located in the watershed, forming a Town Waterways Preservation Credit program, that is, a transfer strategy that would

swap density parcels out of the watershed and continuing the group formed by the town of Brookhaven and the Pine Barrens Commission to complete the study of the watershed and nail down a clearly defined plan to protect the river were the key strategies of action presented.

It was perhaps the quietest meeting that Brookhaven Town Hall had witnessed recently. The standing-room-only audience listened to the speakers as they gave descriptions of the river, its life force and how conclusions were made through models. It included a social and environmental history of the Carmans River by Brookhaven hamlet resident and Post Tomorrow Foundation Vice President Tom Williams, a technical committee member who helped develop the protection plan, who is also co-chair of the Carmans River Partnership. The audience also heard Director of the Division of Environmental Protection John Turner's input regarding the amazing plant, animal and aquatic ecosystem from the headwaters between the northern boundary of Cathedral Pines County Park in Middle Island and Middle Country Road (State Route 25) to the Great South Bay ending in the Wertheim Refuge. Many residents mingled with presenters for over

a half-hour after the conference ended.

What stood out at this conference was that several specific solutions and timelines were given. Lesko commented that the watershed plan would be fast-tracked to coincide with the creation of the Watershed Protection Overlay District. While environmental director John Turner stated that a little more than a third of the watershed has been protected, representing 5,600 acres, two new parcels in fact had just been purchased within the last two weeks. They were the Motz property, 14 acres on the

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northeast corner of Longwood Road and County Road 21, and the Moran property, a six-acre lot, both in Middle Island. Lesko said he was making it a priority to spend \$50 million on open space preservation over the course of three years.

Town spokesperson Jack Krieger said the town had committed \$50 million (\$10 million a year from 2009-2013 in the capital budget) over the next five years but moved up \$10 million, originally available for 2013, to this year. While the \$50 million will be applied to a variety of properties, "the supervisor has stated the preservation of open space with the Carmans River Watershed is a priority and we are in the process of acquiring 200 acres in the watershed," Krieger said.

When questions were answered, via written requests brought up to the dais, Chick Voorhis, a certified planner and environmental professional and a partner in Nelson, Pope & Voorhis, was asked what concentration of a nitrogen standard he would like to see in the Carmans River. Voorhis, who provided input about invasive species and water quality data, replied, "2.5 mg/l is a good benchmark," to murmurs of approval.

The New Jersey Pinelands, which has a similar ecological makeup as the Long Island Pine Barrens, has strict nitrogen standards of 2 mg/l, which local environmental advocates have been hoping for as a close standard for the Carmans River.

The Carmans River receives its primary source of water from ground water with its secondary input from storm water runoff.

There are five dams, or weirs, constructed along its length; there are also several small ponds located with its watershed. Improving and protecting water quality was among the protection plan's goals. That included bumping up storm water treatment provisions.

Currently, six change of zone applications, 20 site plans and six subdivisions are percolating in the Planning Department representing 32 projects within the Carmans River environs said Planning Commissioner Tullio Bertoli. Bertoli, who marshaled the conference together, a six-month project, said those submissions would still proceed, but with caveats. "It's tough to do a moratorium in this recession," he said. "We're going to review each project in the spirit of what was presented. The best way you preserve the watershed is to buy up all the property surrounding it, but we can't do that. So we're turning to transfer of development rights and clustering objectives. Look, we can't force people to sell to us if they don't want to, but they have to know they'll have to cluster 50 percent of the property if it's in the watershed or build on 50 percent of the property; preservation can be also be done with a combination of transfer of development rights."

Lee Koppelman, former executive director of the Long Island Regional Planning Department and one of the consultants who helped form the Carmans River Protection Plan, cited the town's strong commitment to preserving the Carmans and talked about the county raiding their open space fund for other initiatives, while Brookhaven remained strictly on course. "I can't think of a stronger environmen-



Brookhaven Planning Commissioner Tullio Bertoli kicks off the Carmans River Conference to over 100 people who came to Brookhaven Town Hall. Seated are (left to right) Supervisor Mark Lesko, Councilwoman Connie Kepert (4th District) and County Legislator Kate Browning (WF-Shirley).
ADV/Leuzzi

tal issue than the Carmans River," he said. "I'm completely optimistic it can be accomplished."

Marilyn England, president of the Open Space Council, DEC Regional Fisheries Manager Chart Guthrie and Trout Unlimited representatives attended, as did other environmental and civic group leaders like MaryAnn Johnston of ABCO and Peggy Judd of Save the Yaphank Lakes.

"They worked very hard on this and spoke with a lot of people within the Carmans River area about their concerns," said South Yaphank Civic Association President Johan McConnell of the technical group. "(Legislator Kate Browning's aide) Josh Slaughter came in and gave a presentation on Legacy Village. I know Tullio is taking this very seriously and Mark too which set the tone. I just thought there should have been more time for

questions answered."

Richard Amper, executive director of the Long Island Pine Barrens Society, said he liked the dream. "As an environmentalist, I'm impatient to get the plan in place," he commented. "We'd like to see it turn into a reality and would be the first ones to applaud when it is."

Peconic Baykeeper Kevin McAllister agreed it was a good presentation but said there was an important omission in not addressing residential sanitary waste systems and he pointed to the county. "Their sanitary code is directed to protecting drinking water," he said. "It's grossly deficient in protecting surface waters. That subject has to be in the mix." McAllister said the technology was out there, specifically a denitrification system. "Massachusetts has been using techniques (like this) the county doesn't have," he said. ■